

SENATOR DEREK SLAP

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State of Connecticut

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February 8, 2022

Thank you, Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, and members of the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 5190, An Act Concerning HIV Testing.

At the end of 2019, an estimated 1,189,700 people had been diagnosed and were living with HIV in the US. An additional 150,500 people were estimated to be living with HIV without a diagnosis. In Connecticut, 28% of new HIV diagnoses were “late testers” meaning that the disease had progressed to an AIDS defining condition less than a year after being diagnosed with HIV. Early detection is crucial in preventing further transmission of the disease. Due to the lack of resources surrounding testing, in addition to the stigma surrounding an HIV diagnosis, people are not getting tested. This could lead to a catastrophic number of infections and a continuation of this epidemic for years to come.

Routinely testing all patients 13 and older for HIV regardless of the possibility of exposure will help reduce the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and will increase the standard of care for all patients. HIV is a disease that attacks the entire body, a timely diagnosis is critical for not only the proper treatment of the patient, but to prevent further transmission within the community.

The implementation of this bill will allow doctors and nurses in primary care settings as well as medical professionals in emergency departments and urgent care facilities to provide tests to their patients. This is especially important to increase the standard of health equity in the state by allowing those who use these emergency facilities as primary care to still have routine access to testing. Additionally, testing all patients will remove the responsibility from doctors to determine whether their patient is at risk. Currently, providers must decide if their patient is at-risk by conducting a “targeted risk screening” to determine if a test for HIV is necessary. This measure may inhibit some patients from ever receiving a test whether it is fear of judgement or a lack of information about the nature of the disease. Introducing this standard will help to destigmatize the process of getting tested and give people the life-saving treatment they need.

In 2018, Connecticut’s “Getting to Zero” commission, charged with slowing the spread of HIV, released a report with 6 major recommendations of how to help end the epidemic. In line with these recommendations, the commission established community partners across the state to create education programs for communities and providers about the best ways of combatting HIV transmission. Because of the hard work of advocates, there are community-based organizations that are ready to provide assistance with education programs and linkage to care, treatment, and prevention services. The AIDS Education Training Center is committed to

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offering trainings to assist providers in how to ask patients about testing, and the Connecticut Department of Health is constructing "tool kits" for providers that will give information and resources surrounding HIV and AIDS.

Passing the bill will put Connecticut in line with the CDC guidelines regarding HIV testing for patients 13 and older. Additionally, similar bills have been passed in both New York and Florida, each with favorable outcomes. New York implemented their law in 2010 and saw the quarterly testing rates in ambulatory centers increase from 2.8% to 5.7%. After the enactment, 1 in 3 New Yorkers were offered HIV testing, and 90% of those who were offered were willing to take the test if recommended by a doctor. Florida's bill was passed in 2015, and by 2018 100,200 tests were performed. Results found a 1.6% seropositivity rate. Before routine testing, the seropositivity rate was less than 1%. This statistic demonstrates how many people may not know they are living with HIV and potentially spread it to others in the community. Routine testing allows the patient access to more knowledge about their own personal health, and what can be done to protect them in the future.

Overall, HB 5190 will help save lives and reduce the presence of this disease in the state. I urge you to support this bill to protect Connecticut citizens against this disease.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derek Slap".

Sen. Slap